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In Memoriam.



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EXERCISES

AT THE

Unveiling of the Mural Tablet

ERECTED IN THE

College of the City of New York,

BY THE ALUMNI,

TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE OF THEIR NUMBER WHO FELL IN
THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY DURING
THE LATE CIVIL WAR.

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In pursuance of a resolution passed by the Alumni of the College of the City of New York at the annual meeting in June, 1872, a committee of three, consisting of Messrs. Edwin M. Cox, George Sparrow and J. Seaver Page, was appointed to receive subscriptions, select a design and erect a mural tablet to the memory of those of the Alumni who perished in the war for the Union. The design of Mr. James S. Wightman was selected, and the work pushed with such energy that the tablet itself was completed in June, 1873.

On the 28th of that month, it was unveiled before an audience which thronged the hall and the staircases.

Mr. Edwin M. Cox, Vice-President of the Alumni, opened the exercises by introducing the designer of the tablet, Mr. James S. Wightman.

Mr. Wightman explained briefly the architectural decorations and the allegorical devices of the monument.

Mr. Frederic J. de Peyster, Historian of the Alumni, was then introduced and spoke as follows :

“ My friends,—We stand here in reverence before the marble which bears the names of those brave men who went forth from their books to lay down their fresh young lives for us, for their country and their God. I feel how poor and weak words are to express the emotions that struggle for utterance on an occasion like this, but it is my privilege as well as my duty to speak a few words of our gallant dead, and no matter how poor the offering, it is at least made in a spirit of sincere admiration and gratitude. Six of the seven whose names are on this tablet I had the honor of knowing ; most of them intimately ; *Edward K. Wightman* alone I did not know, except by reputation. But in his case even a knowledge so imperfect is sufficient to awaken the warmest admiration. A writer of distinction on the staff of one of the most respectable journals of this city, he sacrificed his prospect of speedy success to join the standard of the 9th New York Volunteers.

In the army he served faithfully in not less than fifteen engagements—for in an engagement he was never absent from the ranks ; and at last, on the 15th of January, 1865, in the successful assault on Fort Fisher, the fifth man to enter the fortress, he fell, bravely fighting, sword in hand. A gallant soldier ! He had the good fortune to meet a soldier's death.

“ Far different, though not less noble, was the fate of *James Lyman Van Buren*. One of the most graceful and finished gentlemen I have ever had the good fortune to meet. He entered the service, with chivalrous enthusiasm, as a second lieutenant of zouaves. Accompanying General Burnside's expedition to North Carolina, he was soon transferred to the Signal Service, in accordance with an order requiring that a certain number of the most intelligent officers should be detached for that purpose. While thus attached as signal officer to General Foster's staff, he distinguished himself at the battles of Roanoke Island and Newberne. Brevetted major for gallant and meritorious conduct, he was soon after transferred to the staff of General Burnside.

With that distinguished commander he remained through all the changes and chances of the fierce struggle in Virginia, and with him Major Van Buren went West, to be again brevetted—this time lieutenant-colonel—for gallant and meritorious conduct during the siege of Knoxville. Moving East again with the Ninth Army Corps, he bore his part bravely, not only through the campaigns in the Wilderness and on the south side

of the James, but also in that final triumph, when, on April 2d, 1865, Petersburg was stormed. The war was over in the East, and, honored with the brevets of colonel and brigadier general, he came home to die. Brave and chivalrous, he had risked his life on many a battle-field; his clothes were often torn by bullets; on one occasion a shot shattered his sword within its scabbard: yet death after a lingering illness—not the death he had so often courted in the thick of battle—was his fate; sadder, but not less glorious.

“ Franklin Butler Crosby was born in this city of New York on the 4th of February, 1841. Tall, strong and handsome, his mind was not less favored than his body; he was, indeed, an admirable compound of intellect, good taste and manly courage. He had, what in these degenerate days is so rare, the ideal of classic completeness—‘the sound mind in a sound body.’ Of such stuff was the second lieutenant who joined the 4th U. S. Artillery in August, 1861. Ability and good conduct soon made him first lieutenant, and the promotion of his captain gave him command of the battery. On the 2d of May, 1863, that battery was hotly engaged at Chancellorsville; during the night; it was of the greatest service in repelling the famous attack of Stonewall Jackson. At half-past eight o'clock the next morning, Sunday, May 3d, a bullet from a sharpshooter, who had gained the right flank of the battery and singled out its young commander, pierced his breast. He fell. His own men tenderly and tearfully carried him a few

rods to the rear. One loving message to the dear ones at home, and his brief but glorious career was ended.

Of *William Cullen Bryant Gray* I have been able to learn but few particulars. Still, as a classmate, and during college years, a neighbor, as well as an intimate friend, I can do some slight justice to his great merit. With a body weak and sickly, he had all the spirit of an old Spartan; a spirit that enabled him to do and to suffer in a way that seemed to stronger, but less high-spirited men, little less than supernatural. Born with a love of letters, as a contributor to our literary journals he showed no small talent, while yet an undergraduate. But at the first note of danger, he threw aside his books, resigned all the literary pursuits he loved so well, to risk all for his imperiled country. A severe cold contracted while on duty, brought on an attack of pleuropneumonia. His delicate frame could ill resist such an assault. A brief period of suffering, and all was over. Amid the delirium of fever, he thought of nothing but his duty; his only regret was that he could not meet death on the battle-field, and his last words were of his soldiers.

Charles Clarence Tracy Keith, though descended from one of the best families in South Carolina, was an early, ardent lover of liberty; and not of liberty for himself alone, but for all. To him the Constitution of the United States, as it stood before the war, was the bulwark of slavery. It was his ambition to become a

lawyer. But when he learned that before entering the Bar, he must swear allegiance to that Constitution, his reverence for Liberty, his devotion to duty, conquered even the rosy-hued ambitions of early manhood, and he at once turned his back on the profession by which he could alone hope to realize the brilliant dreams of youth. To such a spirit the War was a Crusade. With all the ardor of his enthusiastic temperament, he threw himself into the ranks. Like Van Buren, he was soon transferred for his intelligence to the Signal Service. While on this duty, in North Carolina, he was thrown from his horse, his head struck a stone, damaging his brain so seriously that but little hope of either his mind or his life remained. In this wretched condition, I saw him. Conscious of the worst, and yet resigned; manly, almost cheerful under the most dreadful affliction that can befall humanity—the knowledge of wrecked and fast decaying powers, old age in the hey-day of youth; idiocy or death his only future. What fate could be sadder, what courage more heroic.

Edward Francis Young was one of the most brilliant scholars that ever graced these halls. His reading was extensive, and his information so great, that it was a matter of curiosity with me to find out, not how much he knew, but whether there was anything he did not know. As a scholar, our Alma Mater may well mourn his loss. And so winning were his social qualities and kind heart, that while this generation of graduates survives, he will never want sincere mourners. Although a husband and

a father, his ardent patriotism early forced him to volunteer. In the army, as here, his great mental powers were patent to all, and he soon reached in the Engineers—the most intellectual branch of the service—the high rank of Major. While stationed at a fort near Washington, in the Autumn of 1863, he undertook one night a tour of inspection, his horse stumbled and fell upon the brave young soldier crushing him so fearfully, that death, usually so dreaded, was welcomed by him as a friend. Brave, but unfortunate, had he lived, his genius, enthusiasm and courage would surely have raised him to eminence. Like Keith's was his end—so sad, so disappointing, and yet so noble.

Gilbert M. Elliott was born in Connecticut, in 1840. His career in this college needs no mention from me ; it was marked by more triumphs than ever fell to the lot of any other student. Triumphs, too, that were all fairly earned—so fairly earned that no breath of envy ever disputed his right to any one of the many honors that each commencement rained down upon him. His brilliant success might well have tempted him to devote his life to study ; but the battle of Bull Run, instead of daunting, fired him, and he at once joined the 102d New York Volunteers. He brought to the discharge of his new duties the same energy and mental vigor that had so distinguished him here. After two years' faithful service in the East, for which he was rewarded with the rank of Major, his battalion, forming part of General Hooker's Army, was sent to Chattanooga.

Elliott was now in command of his regiment ; and on the afternoon of the 24th of November, 1863, while gallantly leading the skirmish line up the steep slope of Look-Out Mountain, he fell pierced by a rifle ball ; a few words of encouragement to his soldiers, and as indomitable a heart as ever throbbed, stopped for ever. It was but just that the Government should mark its appreciation of his distinguished services and heroic death, by bestowing on him the posthumous honors of Lieutenant-Colonel and Colonel.

Thus Van Buren and Gray died from illness, Keith and Young from accident ; while Wightman, Crosby and Elliott fell sword in hand in the wild tornado of battle. If the three last were more fortunate in the manner of their death, it must not tempt us to award more of glory to them. No ! All perished nobly in the same grand cause ; and while rejoicing in the good fortune that gave death on the battle-field to three of our gallant brothers, we cannot but feel a still deeper sympathy for those as brave and true, who, equally desirous of a soldier's death, were yet doomed to waste slowly away on the bed of sickness.

Peace to their ashes. Better and braver soldiers never fell in a cause more worthy. They died young, it is true. But remember the old Hellenic sentiment : " Those whom the gods love die early." They did, indeed, die early, in the very dawn of life, before they had fairly tasted its joys and triumphs ; but also before its sorrows and disappointments had had time to

overtake them. But though they died so young, their lives were not in vain. Length of days is in no ratio to performance. Performance is the only test. Judged by that test, what must be their meed. Surely we can never honor them too much ; it will be hard to do them even a shadow of justice.

It is but a few years since all hearts were on fire in the great struggle. Then it seemed as if we could never forget one of the true hearts who gave up all for us, for country and for God. The importance of the contest even the heat of battle did not exaggerate—because it could not be exaggerated. As long as there are men on this planet whose hearts are warmed by the sacred love of liberty the memory of this conflict will be held sacred. It will live as a far greater, and not less heroic struggle than that which Holland waged for 80 years against Spain ; than that which Switzerland waged against Austria ; than that which Greece waged against Persia. Homely as they sound in our ears now, I believe the day will yet come when the names of our battles shall have all the halo of glory that now surrounds the magic names of Marathon and Thermopylæ. The grand results are indeed immortal, but the brave young men by whom they were achieved are less likely to be remembered as time goes on, and their friends drop one by one into the grave. It was to resist this tendency that Athens piled the mound at Marathon, and sculptured those matchless marbles that have been the admiration and despair of twenty-three

centuries. It was for this that Rome reared her triumphal arches, and that the Great Napoleon, in imitation of classic times, built his Arch of Triumph. Animated by the same sentiment, we erect this tablet. Our memorial is comparatively humble, but it commemorates men as gallant as any France or Italy, or even Hellas could boast. We put up this marble to tell coming generations of the mingled admiration and gratitude we feel for the noble dead, and to teach the living, by their example, lessons of courage, self-sacrifice and patriotism. Here we have placed it. And here let it rest forever—a memory of our heroes gone, an inspiration to the living.

The President of the Alumni, General H. E. Tremain, then committed the memorial as a sacred trust to the keeping of the Faculty.

General Alexander S. Webb, President of the College of the City of New York responded, by accepting on behalf of the Faculty the care and maintenance of the monument.

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